

How to Keep Your Rabbit Happy, Healthy and Safe

- Take your rabbit to your veterinarian immediately after purchase, then annually for examinations.
- Have your rabbit's oral cavity examined to evaluate for the presence of dental disease.
- Do not administer medications to your rabbit unless directed by your veterinarian. Some medications for other pets or humans are toxic to rabbits.
- Keep your rabbit's toenails trimmed and its fur free of mats and feces.
- Have your female rabbit spayed at an early age to prevent uterine cancer.
- Brush your rabbit's hair frequently.
- Be sure the diet is primarily high-quality grass-based hay.
- Check sipper bottle frequently as rabbits drink a lot of water.
- Proper housing should include:
 - » A cage, box or tunnel for hiding and resting even if the rabbit is given free range in the home
 - » Be cleaned every few days
 - » Be maintained in an ambient temperature between 55–85°F (13–29°C)
 - » Be located in an area with good ventilation
 - » Items for chewing, such as untreated wood, cardboard or safe wooden toys free of artificial dyes, colors or flavors
 - » Suitable substrates, such as shredded paper (non-inked), recycled newspaper composite materials, straw or hay. Avoid pine, cedar and corn cob for bedding.
 - » Ideally be able to travel three hops in every direction inside their house
 - » Have access to a large exercise run
- It is important to prevent rabbits from accessing:
 - » Electrical cords
 - » Blankets and carpets that may be chewed up and ingested
 - » Leaded paint and wood varnish
 - » Unsupervised dogs, cats and other pets
 - » Unsupervised play with young children
 - » Toxic houseplants
 - » Pesticides or other lawn chemicals
 - » Cedar shavings
 - » Tobacco and cigarette smoke
 - » "Gourmet" pellets that include seeds and other additives
 - » Food items that are high in sugar, such as bananas and grapes

Common Disorders of Rabbits

It is recommended that your rabbit have an annual exam. However, if you notice your rabbit exhibiting any of these signs or symptoms, please contact your veterinarian as soon as possible.

- **Cardiac**
- **Gastrointestinal**
 - » Poor or reduced appetite
 - » Reduced pooping
 - » Diarrhea
- **Eye (Ocular)**
 - » Bulging
 - » Draining/crustiness
 - » Cataracts
 - » Redness
- **Dental**
 - » Crooked and/or overgrown teeth
 - » Drooling
- **Infectious**
 - » Bacteria
 - Escherichia coli
 - Pasteurella
 - Bordetella
 - Syphilis
 - » Viruses
 - Myxomatosis
 - Viral Hemorrhagic Fever
- **Malnutrition**
 - » Obesity
 - » Slow digestive tract
 - » Poor hair coat/fur
 - » Can lead to dental disease
- **Nervous**
 - » Head tilt
 - » Circling
 - » Paralysis
 - » Seizures
- **Parasite**
 - » External parasite (Fleas, Ear mites, Fur mites)
 - » Internal parasite (Toxocara, Tapeworm, Coccidia)
- **Reproductive**
 - » Uterine cancer
 - » Testicular cancer
 - » Mammary gland masses
- **Respiratory**
 - » Runny nose
 - » Labored breathing
- **Skin**
 - » Masses
 - » Sore hock
 - » Urine scald
 - » Parasite
 - » Fur loss
 - » Excessive dandruff
 - » Scratching/itchy
- **Trauma/Injuries**
 - » Fractures
 - » Wounds
 - » Burns (electrocution)
- **Urogenital**
- **Urinary**
 - » Calcium sludge
 - » Stones
- **Zoonotic**
 - » Diseases transferrable between humans and animals (e.g. Rabies, Lyme disease)

Resources

- **Association of Exotic Mammal Veterinarians** (AEMV.com)
- **Lafeber Emerald** (lafeber.com/vet/mammal-medicine)
- **Oxbow Animal Health** (oxbowanimalhealth.com)
- **The House Rabbit Society** (rabbit.org)

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How to Care for Your

Rabbit



To learn more, visit the Association of Exotic Mammal Veterinarians at **AEMV.com**

ABOUT YOUR RABBIT

Rabbits belong to a group of animals called lagomorphs. Domestic rabbits are descendants of European rabbits, which were introduced and still live free in many other parts of the world, with the exception of North America. There are several species of North American free-ranging rabbits, including the cottontail; none of these makes a suitable pet.

Domestic rabbits make excellent pets and come in many varieties, including the Dutch (cover), Netherland dwarf, New Zealand, Lop (mini, Holland), Rex (standard, mini) and Lionhead. Rabbits may be purchased from pet shops or breeders or adopted from shelters nationwide.

Rabbits are gentle, quiet animals that make excellent pets, making them a popular companion animal choice.



What to Expect from Your Rabbit

Rabbits have dynamic personalities and enjoy human interaction. They like to explore and chew, so it is important to protect your home (furniture, electrical cords, wood) against their inquisitive nibbling when they are allowed to roam around your house. It is important to provide a stimulating environment for rabbits, including a variety of foods and toys. Toys may be as simple as toilet paper rolls, PVC tubing or safe wooden toys made specifically for rabbits.

Are rabbits tame?

The more time you spend with your rabbit, the more friendly and bonded he or she will become. While usually gentle with owners, rabbits may kick, scratch or bite when frightened or startled; therefore, interaction with young children must be supervised. A rabbit should be handled carefully, especially when being removed from its cage. The hindquarters should always be supported, as rabbits may kick their powerful hind legs while being held or picked up, resulting in serious spinal injuries.

Is your rabbit a male or female?

It's often tricky to properly determine the sex of very young rabbits. Mature male rabbits have relatively large testicles; however, the testicles are not always in the scrotum and may be missed. The female rabbit has a single vaginal slit. It is strongly recommended to neuter or spay pet rabbits. It eliminates the risk of unwanted pregnancies, sexual frustration, and reduces territorial aggression and urine spraying. Additionally, it has been reported that 80% of female rabbits over the age of 3 years may develop uterine cancer. Spaying eliminates the risk of this common reproductive disease. Male rabbits may benefit from neutering as well.

What should you feed your rabbit?

The most important part of a rabbit's diet is hay. The adult rabbit should have grass hay available at all times and can be offered a limited amount of high quality, uniform pellets made from grass hay (approximately 1 tablespoon per 2 lbs).

Growing and lactating rabbits, however, should be offered alfalfa hay and pellets made from alfalfa hay in addition to grass hay. Rabbits are typically weaned off alfalfa between the ages of 4-6 months because it is too high in dietary protein and calcium. No rabbit should be fed pellets with grains, such as corn and wheat, or additives like dried fruits or nuts. Hay is the most important part of a rabbit's diet and is essential for maintenance of a healthy digestive system and teeth.

Rabbits also enjoy a handful of fresh dark leafy greens and other vegetables daily. Introduce greens gradually, as rabbits not accustomed to these foods may suffer from digestive upset. Rabbits may also benefit from grazing natural, untreated grasses outdoors. This provides environmental enrichment and allows exposure to UV light, which may be important for optimal bone health. Fresh drinking water must be provided at all times in a sipper bottle, which should be inspected regularly for leaks, and/or a sturdy water bowl. Rabbits naturally engage in cecotrophy; they ingest the softer, sticky fecal droppings they produce.

Where should you house your rabbit?

Rabbits need as much space as possible to exercise. This may include a spacious hut, a special rabbit-proofed room or an area sectioned off with a pet corral. The larger the area, the better, as rabbits like to scamper in bursts of energy. Supervised yard exercise should be offered in an area where grass and plants have not been treated with pesticides or other harmful chemicals. Outdoor housing must be sheltered from excessive sun and predators. Rabbits may develop foot lesions from wire or slatted flooring. At least some solid flooring must be provided. Clean your rabbit's cage at least once a week to control urine odor. Rabbits may be trained to use a litter box. Paper-type litters are recommended. Rabbits may be kept as pairs; however, pairs should be spayed and/or neutered to prevent unwanted reproduction, aggression and injuries from fighting. Introduction of unfamiliar rabbits should be done on neutral territory.